

**Amendment to the Claims:**

1. (currently amended) A musical instrument apparatus adapted for operation by a user, the musical instrument apparatus comprising:

a body extending between a bridge and a head, the body including a neck having an upper surface at least partially extending between the bridge and the head;

multiple parallel strings secured between the bridge and the head above the upper surface, the multiple parallel strings defining a string line each string having a string length;

a keyboard overlay having keys operatively connected to hammers positioned in a hammer line, each hammer operable to contact the strings to generate vibration along the string length and also operable to remain in contact with the string to provide a reduced string length;

dampening material contacting each string on one side of the hammers;

wherein the hammer line is positioned at an acute angle to the string line such that each hammer is operatively positioned to contact at least one of the multiple parallel strings and the multiple parallel strings extend past an edge of the keyboard overlay opposite the damping material such that the user can directly play at least one of the multiple parallel strings.

2. (original) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the hammers are directly mounted to the keys.

3. (original) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein at least one hammer is adapted to cause vibration at least one of the multiple parallel strings.

4. (original) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the multiple parallel strings includes a first string having a first length adapted to vibrate at a first frequency and at least one hammer is adapted to clamp the first string against the upper surface to form a reduced length that vibrates at a second frequency.

5. (original) The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the at least one hammer is further adapted to release the first clamped string.

6. (canceled)

7. (canceled).

8. (canceled).

9. (canceled).

10. (original) The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising an electrical pickup positioned to sense vibration of at least one of the multiple parallel strings and generate an electrical signal.

11. (original) The apparatus of claim 1, the body including a hollow resonant area adapted to provide acoustic resonance.

12. (currently amended) A musical instrument apparatus adapted for operation by a user, the musical instrument apparatus comprising:

multiple parallel strings spaced apart by a first distance, the multiple parallel strings secured between a bridge and a head and positioned above an upper surface, the multiple parallel strings defining a string line, each string having a string length; and

a keyboard overlay having keys spaced at a second distance that is greater than the first distance, the keys operatively connected to hammers positioned in a hammer line, each hammer operable to contact the strings to generate vibration along the string length and also operable to remain in contact with the string to provide a reduced string length;

dampening material contacting each string on one side of the hammers;

wherein the hammer line is positioned at an acute angle to the string line such that each hammer is positioned to contact at least one of the multiple parallel strings and the multiple

parallel strings extend past an edge of the keyboard overlay opposite the damping material such that the user can directly play at least one of the multiple parallel strings.

13. (original) The apparatus of claim 12, wherein the hammers are directly mounted to the keys.

14. (original) The apparatus of claim 12, wherein at least one hammer is adapted to cause vibration at least one of the multiple parallel strings.

15. (original) The apparatus of claim 12, wherein the multiple parallel strings includes a first string having a first length adapted to vibrate at a first frequency and at least one hammer is adapted to clamp the first string against the upper surface to form a reduced length that vibrates at a second frequency.

16. (original) The apparatus of claim 15, wherein the at least one hammer is further adapted to release the first clamped string.

17. (canceled)

18. (original) The apparatus of claim 12, further comprising an electrical pickup positioned to sense vibration of at least one of the multiple parallel strings and generate an electrical signal.

19. (original) The apparatus of claim 12, the body including a hollow resonant area adapted to provide acoustic resonance.